

3 Reasons for Small Town Businesses to Be Open Evenings and Weekends

And 11 Ideas to Help You Do It Profitably



Limited hours like these are the number one complaint I hear against small town business. Most small town retail businesses seem to be open only during “standard business hours” of 9 am to 5 or 6 pm. Those hours are no longer profitable for small town retail. We’re going to cover three reasons why, the biggest secret to making later hours work, and 11 ideas to ease into longer hours profitably.

A special publication of SmallBizSurvival.com

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Why shouldn't I be closed evenings and weekends?

Reason 1. 70% of all consumer retail spending takes place after 6:00 pm.

That's according to Roger Brooks. "While we [customers] are moving to the European standard of dining and shopping later in the evenings, downtowns haven't made the change at all."

Sources: <http://bit.ly/1hmd4dQ> <http://bit.ly/1hmdpNQ>

Reason 2. The top 4 times to be open are on weekends.

Bob Phibbs, the Retail Doctor, said studies have shown that, in order, these are the best money-making times for retail:

1. Saturday 11 am – 1 pm
2. Saturday 3 pm – 5 pm
3. Sunday 3 pm – 5 pm
4. Sunday 11 am – 1 pm

If you aren't open weekends, you just missed all four of these.

"Build a schedule for your employees around those higher sales times. Put the customer first when you schedule, not the employee," Phibbs said.

Source: <http://bit.ly/1emQcFm>

Reason 3. Busy employed people shop evenings.

'Time of Day' marketing research by Scott Dacko shows that busy, time-pressured people shop during evenings. People with jobs make better customers. This research turns out to be the best tool for understanding why being open later hours is so difficult and what to do about it. Read on...

Source: <http://bit.ly/1emQsUD>

Evening Customers Are Different Customers

Everyone seems to be trying to get people downtown during later hours, but when you've tried opening for evening hours, no one came. It's frustrating!

One key to crack the code: evening customers will be different customers.

You'll need to adjust your product selection and your entire approach to draw them in. That's the biggest lesson from the [Time of Day Marketing research from Scott G. Dacko](#).

You know better than anyone else what works in your business during the day. Sadly, your many years of retail experience work against you after hours. You don't get to just extend your current business into later hours. Succeeding in evening hours is more like starting a whole new store targeting different customers and offering different merchandise in different ways. It means re-learning a lot that you thought you knew.

How to Make It Work

Learn about these new customers. Spend some time inside other businesses that are already open late, even unrelated ones like the fitness place or restaurant. Hang around at late downtown events like concerts and walks. Snoop. Look at who is there. Are they different from your usual customers? What do they talk about? Can you observe clues about what brands and qualities they like? Who would be a good person to talk with to learn more about what they might want from you, if only you offered it?



Your daytime ladies may love your Vera Bradley purses, but the evening gals may want Michael Kors. I don't know, and honestly, neither do you, yet. You'll have to do the research.

Show them they're special. Once you know what new items you'll be offering, you don't want to sprinkle them throughout the store. That makes it hard for evening customers to find. You have to show your new customers they matter to you with a special display of stuff they'll love as soon as they walk in.

Can you make a quick-change display? How about a fancy wheelbarrow full of special evening items you can roll out before evening hours start at 6 pm. Maybe you can create a special sidewalk display with help from a member of that target evening demographic.



Change the mood. You may have to adapt your store's vibe or feeling for these new customers.

- Are your town's evening shoppers always starving, in a rush? Maybe offer a snack.
- Are they winding down, getting calm after a rushed day? Maybe soothing music is in order.
- Are they grabbing essentials, or browsing for fun? You won't know until you ask.

Until you find out their special needs, you can't help them.

Making evening hours work is hard work. But the reward is renewed relevance and a better shot at surviving and thriving.

More ways to make evening hours work, on the next page...

Ideas to ease into longer hours

Making change in your business is always hard. Here are a few ways to make it easier and more profitable.



Idea 1. Start with special events, like community strolls or art walks.

If there will be people near your store, be open. This lets you ease into longer business hours one event at a time and it brings extra revenue to cover the added costs.

Idea 2. Get in the holiday spirit with longer hours during the holidays.

You'll have extra traffic during the holidays, so this is a great time to make it easier for shoppers.

Idea 3. Get help with your first hire.

The first time you hire an employee, it takes lots of work. You need to register with new agencies, fill in new paperwork, figure out how you'll do your payroll, and more. Turn to local business help, like the extension service or the Small

Business Development Center. They can help you with the process the first time. The second and third hires are much easier.

Idea 4. Share the cost of adding staff.

New evening and weekend hours will mean a need for increased staffing for most businesses. A few businesses could share the cost of extra help, or a larger group could create a staffing pool.

Idea 5. Let your sales data be your guide.

Start tracking your sales by time of day now. Use your point of sale system or your credit card data to help analyze hour-by-hour. Even an ordinary cash register can help by starting a separate shift for evening hours.

Ideas to get the people in the door

It doesn't do any good to add extra hours if no one knows about them or you are the only merchant downtown open late. Here are ways to get momentum going.

Idea 6. Partner on special events in town.

Special events like art walks or evening strolls give people a specific reason and specific time to be out shopping, but they don't happen by magic. It takes community members and businesses working together to create them. Making the effort to be open during the events is better than staying closed, but if you really want to benefit, be a partner in these events. Have artists display their works or musicians perform. Put out refreshments. Be part of the celebration.



Idea 7. Put it in your ads.

Take advantage of the advertising you already do to make a big deal about your special hours. Newspaper, radio, email, flyers, window signs, anything you do to reach customers should feature your new longer hours.

Idea 8. Get social on social networks.

If you have social network accounts, use them to promote your special new hours. Send immediate messages while you're open late. "We're open RIGHT NOW to help you with..."

Idea 9. Make it obvious.

Set out a signboard, a special display or something else that makes it obvious you're open.

Idea 10. Hit the bars.

Check around. Other businesses near you already stay open late like bars, restaurants, banks and tanning salons. Talk to the owners about cross-promoting your new hours. Consider hanging flyers or signs in their window or entryway. Maybe give them a special promotional item. Get together and brainstorm.

Idea 11. Stick it out even when it feels lonely.

It's going to take time to retrain customers about your new hours. There will be slow nights and even empty weekends. Keep promoting, keep trying new things, and keep asking customers what works for them.

Thank you for caring about your business and your community. When your business prospers, your community will prosper, too. Making your business the best it can be is the most important step you can take to shape the future of your town.

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